

Remarks

The Final Office Action mailed April 4, 2005 has been carefully considered, and Applicants' counsel offers the following remarks. The Attorney for the Applicants appreciates the Examiner Nutter's consideration of the Request For Interview After Final faxed to the Examiner on May 30, 2006. Favorable reconsideration of the present application is respectfully requested.

Claims 1 and 20 have been amended for clarification of the invention. No new matter has been added.

On page 2 of the Final Office Action, the Examiner discussed "The Information Disclosure Statement" filed 20 January 2006 fails to comply with 37 CFR 1.98(a)(3) because it does not include a concise explanation of the relevance as it is presently understood by the individual designated in 37 CFR 1.56(c) most knowledgeable about the content of the information." For the reasons set forth below, the Applicants believe that they have complied with 37 CFR 1.98(a)(3) for all of the Information Disclosure Statements submitted to the USPTO.

The Information Disclosure Statement attached to the 20 January 2006 response was not newly submitted, but was responsive to the Examiner marking the Foreign References on the IDS date stamped by the USPTO "August 7, 2000" as "MISSING." The Applicants fully explained in the Response of 20 January 2006, "that out of caution, we are resubmitting the foreign references marked 'missing.'"

The Applicants originally submitted the Information Disclosure Statements on August 3, 2000 including a concise explanation of the relevance of the references made by the individual

most knowledgeable about the content of the information. The Information Disclosure Statement of August 3, 2000 has never been fully acknowledged by the Examiner. The US Patent Documents in the Information Disclosure Statement filed August 3, 2000 were initialed by the Examiner on October 5, 2005. It is requested that the Examiner acknowledge the Foreign Patent Documents portion of the August 3, 2000 Information Disclosure Statement and withdraw this objection.

The Examiner's attention is directed to four other Information Disclosure Statements in the file. A Supplemental Information Disclosure Statement was submitted on October 10, 2000; a Third Information Disclosure Statement on October 16, 2000; a Fourth Information Disclosure Statement on December 15, 2000; and a Fifth Information Disclosure Statement on March 8, 2005. Each of these Information Disclosures was received by the USPTO as evidenced by the date stamped post card. The Non Patent Literature Documents in the Fifth Information Disclosure Statement were initialed by Examiner Ragura on April 19, 2005. The US Patent Documents in the Information Disclosure Statement filed August 3, 2000 were initialed by the Examiner on October 5, 2005. It is requested that the Foreign Patent Documents of the Information Disclosure Statement, the Supplemental Information Disclosure Statement, the Third Information Disclosure Statement, and the Fourth Information Disclosure Statement be considered and acknowledged by the Examiner.

Claims 1-6 and 20-22 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) as anticipated by or, in the alternative, under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as obvious over Woodrum (US 5,997,690). The Office Action asserts that Woodrum teaches the production of a web by a wet-laid process that includes an ion sensitive superabsorbent polymer (SAP), fibers, and a salt dissolved in the water carrier. Also, the Final Office Action points out the paragraph bridging columns 3 and 4 for the

disclosure of neutralization of the polymer. According to the Office Action, SAP is discussed in depth at column 6 (line 27) to column 7 (line 26), including the surface cross-linking thereof.

It is noted to the Examiner that the paragraph bridging columns 3 and 4 does not disclose neutralization of the superabsorbent polymer but discloses “[t]he preferred salt is sodium sulfate because chloride salts contribute to metal stress cracking, and carbonates have the effect of further neutralizing the SAP.” Clearly, by this, Woodrum teaches one does not use a neutralizing agent in the water slurry.

It is also stated in the Office Action that:

The reference teaches essentially what is recited and claimed herein except with reference to the concept of pre-SAP. The constituents are identically disclosed and employed in identical capacities. Other than a matter of nomenclature, the reference is deemed render the claims at least obvious, if not anticipated.

Woodrum specifically discloses a composition comprising a superabsorbent polymer in the production of the web. Superabsorbent polymers as disclosed in Woodrum are known to immediately swell when exposed to water, which is to be expected in a wet laid production which includes water.

On the other hand, the present application claims a water sorptive product comprising a wet-laid web of a slurry of particulate pre-superabsorbent polymer, fiber, and water to which the neutralization agent is added after the water is removed. As defined in the present application, the pre-superabsorbent polymer does not swell when it comes in contact with the water in the wet laid process.

By definition as set forth in the present application, a superabsorbent polymer is not a pre-superabsorbent polymer. The present application sets forth in the Definitions of Abbreviations that SAP is a polymer which absorbs over 50 times its weight in water, and

defines a pre-SAP as a polymer that absorbs either very little or no water. The components of the claimed invention are not identical to those disclosed in Woodrum as alleged by the Examiner. The pre-superabsorbent polymer of the claimed invention is not the superabsorbent polymer as disclosed in Woodrum, and Woodrum does not include a neutralization agent added to the pre-superabsorbent polymer during the making of the wet laid web.

Woodrum does not disclose or suggest a water sorptive product comprising a wet-laid web of particulate pre-superabsorbent polymer (pre-SAP), neutralization agent, fiber, and water, as set forth in claims 1-6 and 20-24 of the present application. Not only does Woodrum fail to teach a water sorptive product including a neutralizing agent, Woodrum at column 4, lines 2-5, discloses that carbonate salts are not to be used because they have an effect of further neutralizing the SAP. Based on this, Woodrum teaches away from including a neutralizing agent, as required by the present invention. In addition to the foregoing teaching, Woodrum teaches that one skilled in the art would not add a neutralizing agent to the water as set forth therein. The present invention avoids this issue of Woodrum by processing only the pre-superabsorbent polymer in the water, removing the water and then adding the neutralizing agent to form the superabsorbent polymer. Hence, the present invention avoids the issue of contacting the superabsorbent polymer with the water during the wet laid process in making the absorptive product.

In view of the foregoing remarks and amendments to the claims, Applicants submit that this case is now in condition for allowance of claims 1-6 and 20-22, and such action is respectfully requested. The rejection of claims 1-6 and 20-22 under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) as anticipated by or, in the alternative, under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as obvious over Woodrum (US 5,997,690) should be withdrawn.

Respectfully submitted,

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